

THE 120TH INFANTRY SECOND INSTALLMENT, OF THE HISTORY OF THIS FAMOUS ORGANIZATION

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This is the second installment of the history of the 120th Regiment of Infantry, U. S., of service in the World War.

In Belgium, in July, 1918, at "Road Camp," King George V inspected the American troops, who were formed without arms, that being the British custom, but a lot of the Americans, not knowing this rule, thought the British were afraid some of them would take a "pot shot" at their ruler. The King was accompanied by noted British and American officers and after the inspection departed amidst cheers of the troops. Another notable visitor was Elsie Janis, a popular actress, who put on a wonderful show at Watou; a performance never to be forgotten; the only bit of such cheer brought to the regiment between June and November, 1918, and at the time when it was most needed. This daring actress went to the very front.

During this period Major General E. M. Lewis took command of, the 30th Division, Gen. Faison returned to the 60th Brigade and, Col. Minor to the 120th Regiment, Lt. Col. McGhee being transferred to Calais, and Capt. Walter Clark, Jr., to the staff college. Capt. Newby and Lts. Stegall, Gray and McRae, of the 120th, were promoted and sent back to the United States to train a new division; Major Phillips went to the claims department and Capt. Boddie took command of the 3rd Battalion. The training of the Division was now complete and it was ready to fight alone, so it took over the Canal Sector of the Ypres Salient from the 33rd British Division.

This sector extended from a lake about 2,400 yards to the town of Voormezele, the ground being low and the water so near the surface that every hole made by the immense Boche shells became a pool, the Germans holding all the high ground and observation points. The salient was so deep and so narrow, like a V, that it was subject to shell fire from the front, the flanks and even the rear, and sometimes the men in the forward positions believed they were being shelled by their own artillery, while as a matter of fact the shells came from enemy guns on their right and rear.

The history says this whole sector was a ghastly monument to the tenacity and courage of the British soldiers, who for four long years had held it against bitter attacks by the determined enemy; that today it is consecrated ground, made sacred by the bodies of some 400,000 of Britain's finest sons, and that the few Americans who lie there, "where poppies blow," died not for humanity alone, for in death they brought closer the bonds of blood which unite the two great nations.

The relief of the British troops by the 30th Division was to be made on the night of August 17, 1918, and the 120th regiment took over the ground occupied by the 100th British Brigade. Advance parties had become familiar with this sector, for the night was frightfully dark, but thanks to the careful arrangements at 1 o'clock in the morning the bloody salient, so long British, became in part American. The first capture was of a Chinaman, and he only knew two English words, "Yes" and "Calais," so he was sent to the rear, accompanied by the following note by battalion commander Boddie: "Here is a Chinaman, captured near post No. 5. He is either on leave or A. W.O.L. In either case he picked a damn bad place to spend it."

On the night of August 29th a cloud gas attack was made by the 105th Engineers, the 120th Infantry furnishing 400 men to assist, and 2,520 cylinders of phosgene and chlorine gas, on nine trains, each of seven three-ton trucks, were carried on a light railway to a certain point and from there the cars were pushed by hand to the front. The gas was released at the same time from all the cylinders. The Germans at once sent up hundreds of lights of all sorts and opened fire from machine guns by the hundred, but this died out as the gas cloud rolled over them. Bitter fighting followed for the next few days and the first battalion of the 120th got the first fourteen